



*The Journal of
Multimodal Rhetorics*

Vol. 2, Issue 1

Cultural and Material Matters

A WORD FROM THE EDITORS

This issue features exciting articles by Alexandra Hidalgo, Lucy Johnson, and Rachael Graham Lussos, and a thought-provoking Re-view by Cody Jackson. In addition to offering critical takes on the cultural and material aspects of multimodal composition, their work reflects how multimodality informs our everyday lives. From Hidalgo's use of the video mode to Johnson's experience with materials like pipe cleaners to Lussos' creation of activist cakes, research by these authors illustrates diverse approaches to multimodality in scholarship and praxis. Likewise, Jackson's thoughtful reexamination of an established text on nondiscursive rhetorics by Joddy Murray illuminates aspects of multimodality beyond the verbal and the ways in which they contribute to various fields of study.

The editors would like to thank the authors featured in *JOMR* 2.1, and the reviewers without whom this project would not be possible.

We hope you enjoy the new issue!

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Cultural and Material Matters

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Creating Our Pasts Together:

A Cultural Rhetorics Approach to Memoir

Alexandra Hidalgo ♦ Michigan State University

Back in 2009, during the first year of my Rhetoric and Composition Ph.D. at Purdue University, I took a course on Empirical Research with my mentor and future dissertation chair Patricia Sullivan. This was one of our five core courses and thus it was part of the dreaded 24-hour preliminary exam, which we took during our second summer in the program. At 9 a.m., we'd walk into the English Department and receive five questions. The following morning we'd return with five one-thousand-word answers. Needless to say, this is the stuff that grad student nightmares are made of. In order to prepare us for the experience (and to mitigate our fear) we did practice exams while taking the core courses.

The practice exam for Empirical Research asked us to propose a study and I proposed a memoir. When I got the essay back, Pat informed me that had I in fact submitted this answer for a real exam, I would have failed. She generously mentioned that the question she designed had set a trap for me and went on to explain that while we certainly could write a memoir through empirical research, we needed to provide actual evidence to back up our claims.

As I was working on this video essay, I returned to my failed answer and felt a

mix of embarrassment and amusement as I stared at my former self. My proposed empirical research study is basically 1,000 scattered words listing everything about my life that I thought was interesting and tying it, tangentially, to quotes. One wouldn't have guessed it from that exam, but I have gone on to publish well-received scholarship over the years about some of the many topics I proposed in my empirical essay. The secret to those pieces is that I've followed Pat's advice and used plenty of evidence. Although some of the evidence I used were documents, most of it consisted of bringing the perspectives of family and friends into my own story.

In this video essay I use Cultural Rhetorics to propose an approach to crafting memoirs that draw not only from our own experiences but also from the experiences of those featured alongside us. I argue that, even though such memoirs are at times thornier to create, they deliver more ethical and complex versions of what happened than those we write on our own.

Let's start by defining memoir.

Memoir and autobiography sometimes get blurred in the public imagination, but they are distinct genres. As Lynn C. Miller and Lisa Lenard-Cook explain,

“Autobiographies are usually written toward the end of a public figure’s life and recount that life chronologically . . . an autobiography is a record of a life, while a memoir is an exploration of a specific aspect of a life, using fictive techniques to create a dynamic story” (2013, pp. 6-7). In other words, memoir is narrowly focused and crafted and uses storytelling techniques to elicit interest from the audience, since unlike autobiographies, most memoirists don’t come with pre-existing audiences because they’re not public figures to begin with.

From the French word for “memory,” memoirs are our attempt to craft an engaging version of the past that’s also faithful to what transpired. As William Bradley explains, “Memoir, like the essay, has never claimed to present a definitive reality—it is, as the translated understanding of the word essay suggests, the attempt to do so” (2007, p. 210). To further complicate the genre, because our lives are so deeply shaped by our relationships with others, memoirs involve not only our own past but the past of our family, friends, coworkers, teachers, and so on.

Although when I say the word “memoir” most of you picture a book, memoirs take all sorts of shapes: book-length and short alphabetic writing texts, film and video, podcasts, webtexts, art exhibits, dance, and performance art, to name a few. Memoir has long had a place in Rhetoric and Composition classrooms and scholarship through literacy narratives and other writing assignments and publications that spring from the author’s

past. Furthermore, the digital era has turned memoir into a daily practice for many of us. Whether we’re blogging or microblogging through Instagram, Facebook, and other social media spaces, we’re often working within the memoir genre. Anyone who has spent time visiting these spaces knows that they are brimming with records of our personal lives.

Blogging and microblogging often takes place without much thought being given to how those we’re portraying alongside us will feel about the images and anecdotes we post, not just today but a decade from now. Besides applying to more traditional memoirs, the Cultural Rhetorics approach I am proposing here can help us craft a more ethical and communal blogging and microblogging presence. It can also provide new ways of envisioning literacy narratives and other personal genres in which students and scholars represent their lives. I don’t have time to address all those applications directly here but I invite those who watch this video essay to adapt the approach I’m presenting to their own memoir practices in the classroom, in their scholarship, and in their online presence.

My own experience with memoir—besides Facebook and Twitter—comes from publishing academic essays like this one and from my work as a documentary filmmaker. In both genres, I often draw from my family and professional lives. I am currently working on a book-length alphabetic-writing memoir and a feature documentary about my father, who disappeared in the Venezuelan Amazon when I was six years old. Because I’ve

been working on those projects for over 14 years and because they entail moving images and alphabetic writing, I will draw from them as I weave my own experiences with memoir into this narrative.

It is hard to talk about memoir without discussing the reasons why many oppose the genre. Bradley describes what is perhaps the most prevalent complaint people have about memoir when he writes that “[m]any have dismissed [memoir] as a form for the narcissistic and self-involved” (p. 203). While that is certainly true of some memoirs, by collaborating with others as we portray our past, we can deviate some of the intense focus on our own experience and broaden the scope of the stories we tell.

Another complaint since the 1990s memoir boom is that now everyone thinks they have a story worth telling. Sharon O’Dair laments that memoirs “used to be written mainly by people who were in some way exceptional—path breakers and presidents . . . But as befits a demotic culture, in which, we are assured, even the everyday is exceptional, hot sellers on Amazon.com include *Trauma Junkie: Memoirs of an Emergency Flight Nurse* and *Every Day Was New Year’s Eve: Memoirs of a Saloon Keeper* (2002, p. 39). O’Dair, I would argue, is confusing memoir with autobiography. She is also forgetting that one of the key aspects of memoir is the craft with which it is told. Of course, everyone has a story, or many, worth telling. The question is whether or not they have the ability to tell them in an engaging, even transcendent fashion. The Cultural Rhetorics approach I’m

proposing should help us tell stories that are deep and complex, more accurately representing the fragmented way in which memory works.

Another complaint about memoir is the fact that sometimes, as was the case with Margaret Seltzer, memoirs turn out to be completely made up, or as with James Frey, partially false. While a Cultural Rhetorics approach cannot prevent memoirists from lying altogether, it can help keep partial lies in check by bringing more people into the creative process who can point out and work toward resolving misrepresentations.

Now I’m going to provide an overview of Cultural Rhetorics by walking you through some ideas portrayed in “Our Story Begins Here: Constellating Cultural Rhetorics” (2014), an article written by Malea Powell, Daisy Levy, Andrea Riley-Mukavetz, Marilee Brooks-Gillies, Maria Novotny, and Jennifer Fisch-Ferguson. They discuss four “pieces” of the story they’re telling about Cultural Rhetorics: “decolonial practice, story, relations, [and] constellations.” Let’s define them.

1. STORY:

As Powell et al explain, “[T]he practice of story is integral to doing cultural rhetorics. The way we say it—if you’re not practicing story, you’re doing it wrong.” The one thread that binds all variations of memoir together is that they’re all stories about the past. Moreover, following principles outlined by Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch, Cultural Rhetorics isn’t just concerned with story but with “how a

story is told, how a person's experience is honored" (Powell et al., italics in original). This is the sort of complex reflection that thoughtful memoirs are after. Powell et al also draw from Victor Villanueva's focus on story as a methodology. In particular, his constant reminder "that the practice of story doesn't always feel good, and the stories produced in that practice aren't always happy celebrations of our community's accomplishments" (Powell et al). Or in the case of memoir, of our own and our family and friends' life experiences. This acknowledgement of tension is key to making memoirists' expectations more realistic in terms of what the creative process will entail.

2. RELATIONS:

As Powell et al explain, "Cultural rhetorics scholarship is never a practice of individuals making knowledge on their own; it's always a part of a larger community, a larger conversation, a network of relations." Although memoir is indeed primarily seen as "individuals making knowledge on their own," that individual is in fact drawing from their history and relations in order to weave their story. In this video essay I argue that we need to turn toward those who have shaped us in order to tell our own stories. In her description of practicing a Cultural Rhetorics methodology while working with Odawa women to preserve their stories, Riley-Mukavetz writes that "[t]o practice relational accountability, I had to shift perspectives and listen to these women as not only research participants,

but as intellects who understood disciplinary conversations" ("Towards a Cultural Rhetoric"). Following Riley-Mukavetz's example, I argue that memoirists need to not only involve their relations in the storytelling process but to do so acknowledging that those relations are also experts in the past we share and that that expertise must be honored and respected.

3. CONSTELLATIONS:

Powell et al suggest constellations as a model for visualizing how relations engage with each other in Cultural Rhetorics. Powell explains that "[i]t allows for multiply-situated subjects to connect to multiple discourses at the same time, as well as for those relationships (among subjects, among discourses, among kinds of connections) to shift and change without holding a subject captive." The authors discuss the way in which various cultures create different ways of connecting and naming stars, citing "Ursa Major, the Bear, the Big Dipper, [and] the pathway to Sagittarius" as examples of constellations that have emerged out of the same group of stars. Similarly, when it comes to our relations, configurations vary depending on who is telling a particular story. The way in which I understand my oldest son William is different from how his younger brother Santiago understands him. The connections that are drawn for and by each of us will alter the stories we tell about the past we've shared. Making room for those constellating stories results in richer memoirs.

4. DECOLONIAL PRACTICE:

I've left decolonial practice for last because it is not as clearly tied to memoir as the other pieces. Moreover, Powell et al "acknowledge that not all cultural rhetorics scholarship is decolonial." And yet, they "understand decolonial practice as the guiding principle to our work in cultural rhetorics." For them, decolonial work addresses "stories from the perspective of colonized cultures and communities that are working to delink from the mechanisms of colonialism." While not everyone writing memoir comes from a colonized culture, our methods can still be inspired by the spirit of decolonialism. Powell et al. cite Emma Perez's discussion of "the decolonial imaginary [which] becomes a tool for remaking and rewriting, a practice that not only deconstructs, but reconstructs." That aspect of decolonial work fits well with memoir since we often find ourselves revisiting and reimagining the past as we tell it. Doing this work in an ethical fashion that questions inequality at the personal and/or social level can lead to memoirs that have social justice resonance and contribute to the overall decolonial project posed by Cultural Rhetorics.

Now that we have a sense of how Cultural Rhetorics works, let's look at how we can apply those ideas to memoir. I have divided the approach into three levels. Let's start with:

LEVEL 1: REMEMBERING TOGETHER

Remembering Together happens before the official crafting of the memoir begins. What in alphabetic writing we call

research and in filmmaking is known as preproduction. Most documentary filmmakers and journalists use this approach on a regular basis. It entails reaching out to others as we prepare to craft our memoirs and getting a sense of their perspectives through formal and informal interviews, as well as through perusing of family archival materials such as letters, diaries, photos, home footage, newspaper clippings, and objects.

William Bradley wrote his dissertation about surviving Hodgkin's Lymphoma and he didn't show it to his mother until it was completed. He writes that he "was very nervous about how she would react" (p. 202). She liked it except for the moment right after his diagnosis, which she remembered differently than he did. Upon reflection, he realized that her version was the correct one. However, he decided not to change it because "[f]or better or worse, my memoir is a record of my own unreliable and occasionally fractured mind at work. To have my memoir reflect my mother's memory of the event rather than my own would be an act of invention on my part" (p. 210). The fact that they both remember it differently, however, makes the story more nuanced. If he'd interviewed his mother in advance, he'd have known that his memory contradicted hers and may have written a different version, maybe one that had both memories in it. If what we're seeking is truth, more accounts are better than one, even if those accounts differ from each other.

Remembering Together leads to richer stories because we're able to feature more

perspectives in our memoir. Even those perspectives that don't make it into the final version will influence our own perspective of particular events. Moreover, if we remember together, we don't need to be as nervous about showing our work to those featured in it because they have provided us with part of its content.

Remembering Together also has its disadvantages. Some of the relations who remembered with us may decide that they don't want us to include something after we've built our story around it. Moreover, relations who remembered with us may be dissatisfied with how much or how little of their version of the story we ended up featuring in the final piece. This might be the case even if we don't choose to involve them, but being invited to provide their memories and archival materials may give them a stronger sense of ownership over the project.

LEVEL 2: CREATING TOGETHER

Creating Together is a rarer practice than Remembering Together. In alphabetic writing, this level represents the actual writing of the piece. In filmmaking it's when the project is in production. In the documentary about my father, I have not only interviewed a number of his and my relations, but my husband, who is also a character in the story, is the film's cinematographer, someone whose vision literally shapes the film. My mother and my aunt Rima selected where they wanted to be interviewed and chose which stories they wanted to share on camera and which they didn't. We also see them interacting with

each other and with other members of the family over the years, each relationship creating a different constellation on screen.

I am beginning the discussion of *Creating Together* by addressing my documentary because filmmaking is by definition a group activity and the parts of interviews that are used in a documentary traditionally feature sentences and ideas as they were uttered by the interviewees. The same can apply to other genres that rely on recorded voices and images, like podcasts and webtexts. A written memoir, however, requires a bigger jump in order to create together.

We can add other perspectives to our own accounts by directly quoting from interviews, letters, diaries, and other pre-existing writing by our relations, as I'm doing with my aunt's written accounts of her past and with published novels by my father and grandmother for the book version of my project. In an even more adventurous move, we can sit side by side and write about the past together.

The advantages of *Creating Together* are as substantial as the risks. Memoirist Leila Philip mentions that her sister, who isn't listed by name and plays a small role in Philip's family memoir, was upset by the published result. Philip writes, "[I]t was as if by writing the book I had dragged her along on a journey that she had never taken. Her resistance to the book shocked me, but the fact remains: the truth is usually both messy and disruptive" (2011, p. 155). Because memoirs rely on story and stories thrive on conflict, Philip is right to point out that memoirs have a

tendency to unearth some of the least flattering aspects of our past. It is in part that act that makes the memoir process so powerful for the memoirist. Philip goes on, “When I was done shaping my narrative, I experienced a sense of catharsis and relief... Perhaps because memoir is always a journey of self-understanding, it involves epiphanies that can’t be easily shared” (p. 155). That is, unless we Create Together. Even if our relations are only participating in sections of our memoir, they can have epiphanies of their own. My aunt, who has been included in my documentary filmmaking and memoir writing processes for over a decade has developed a much deeper understanding of her brother and mother through our collaboration.

The disadvantages of Creating Together are as considerable as the advantages. It’s the riskiest of the three levels because it means relinquishing a substantial amount of control. Creating Together may lead to arguments over what goes into the piece, and in particular for alphabetic writing, there may be questions about authorship and royalties—if there are any—depending on how much we feature the writing of others. Working with relations with whom we have a deep level of trust and discussing the terms of collaboration in advance can help assuage these potential problems, but the possibility of discord remains.

LEVEL 3: EDITING TOGETHER

This level happens during what we call revision in alphabetic writing and postproduction in filmmaking. Whether

or not we have remembered together and created together, sending drafts of our work to those featured in it and seeking their feedback can help us avoid having our relations feel misrepresented after our memoir is made public in whatever platform it uses, all the way from microblogging to award-winning book.

Unlike Creating Together, the risks taken are not as formidable as the advantages. From basic fact-checking, as Philip’s mother did when she pointed out that her daughter had wrongly identified the disease that attacked the trees in their family farm (p. 152), to adding missing parts to stories we’ve told, as my mother has done over the years, Editing Together helps us come up with a version that more accurately and ethically reflects the past. Moreover, it can result in us having a less complicated relationship with the final product. Philip explains that “[w]hen people write to tell me that my book has touched their lives I am of course deeply gratified. But ... there was also a sharp wave of family aftershock that has taken years to calm down” (p. 155). It is unclear how much editing we would need in order to prevent these kinds of situations, but we may be able to negotiate minor changes to satisfy those who feel wounded or at least explain our need to tell the story a particular way before it is made public. Seeing and commenting on a representation of their past before strangers have access to it can tame some—if not all—of the aftershock Philip describes.

As with the previous levels, there are disadvantages to Editing Together. As

author Anne Lamott reminds us, “[a]ll good writers write [shitty first drafts]. This is how they end up with good second drafts and terrific third drafts” (1995, p. 21). When crafting personal stories, showing our relations who are featured in them our first attempts can be terrifying and unproductive. This disadvantage can be addressed by first showing our drafts to others not involved in the story and developing a more solid version before sharing it with our relations.

Memoirist Bob Cowser Jr. warns that we may not even get to those shitty first drafts if we’re worried about sharing them with our relations. He writes, “Just imagine the loss to literature if nobody dared name names, break silences, broach impoliteness. All any writer needs is another reason (and an ethical one, for Pete’s sake) not to sit down and begin writing” (2011, p. 156). And yet, the fact remains that unless they are dead, those we feature in our work are likely to find it if we make it publicly available. They may be less alarmed by what we’ve revealed if they get the chance to provide input before others have access to it.

The biggest worry with *Editing Together* is that our relations may ask for changes that we may not be ready to make.

Memoirist Natalie Rachel Singer writes about working on a story about a gang rape, where the victim and her family became involved in the editing process. “Draft after draft they picked through everything until what I had was completely bland, until the story had no center, no energy, no voice” (2011, p.

147). If we’re going to let relations look over drafts, we must also negotiate how much control they will have and allow ourselves the possibility of pushing back if their feedback becomes detrimental to what we’re hoping to accomplish.

In my own work telling my father’s story I have engaged in versions of each of these levels, but I haven’t done so with every relation I feature in the documentary and book. Nor have I stuck to each one of the levels through every step of the way over the years I’ve been working on the projects. Still, what I’ve done fits within the Cultural Rhetorics approach to memoir I am proposing. This is not an all or nothing practice. How much of the three levels we implement will depend, not only on the project, but on the strength and nature of the bond we share with the relations featured in that particular memoir. It may not hurt to test the waters by *Remembering Together* with one or two relations and seeing how the stories and the storytellers constellate and evolve through that first step of the process. If it is manageable, the doors are open for attempting the other levels and for bringing in more relations.

Hopefully, as we become more adept at telling the stories of our past alongside others, we can begin to shift away from the traditional image of someone telling their story in isolation and replace it with one of communal, constellated storytelling. Easier? Certainly not. Closer to the fragmented and subjective way in which we all experience reality? Definitely. Worth it? I, at least, cannot

imagine telling my story and that of my relations in any other way.

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by Alexandra Hidalgo

2017

Contending with Multimodality as a (Material) Process

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“[N]ew media texts” [are] those that have been made by composers who are aware of the range of materiality’s of texts and who then highlight the materiality: such composers design texts that help readers/consumers/viewers stay alert to how any text—like its composers and readers—doesn’t function independently of how it is made and in what contexts. Such composers design texts that make as overtly visible as possible the values they embody...new media texts do not have to be digital; instead any text that has been designed so that its materiality is not effaced can count as new media. (Wysocki, 2004, p. 15)

This article is about materiality. How our process is deeply rooted in writing—digital or analog—being inherently multimodal. While more recent composition studies have asserted this plainly in both classroom and scholarship, this article aims to trace the ways that we have been doing this work all along. This article also puts pedagogy into conversation with theory, thereby drawing attention to the materiality of multimodality and process theory.

1. An Introduction: Learning from Discomfort

It was mid-afternoon during the fall semester of my second year of coursework. I sat in the office common room on the first day of my last course required to complete a certificate in Digital Humanities and Culture. Prior to

this moment, I had taken courses in digital methods and digital culture; this seminar would ask me to contend with applying that knowledge in my teaching. It would also have me consider how the addition of multimodality might complicate or enhance my pedagogy and scholarship.

The chairs were arranged in a half circle, with objects on the floor before them. I looked down and saw brightly colored construction paper, pipe cleaners, markers, cotton balls, scissors, and glue. The fluorescent lights illuminated the objects scattered across the dark carpet. I took a seat in one of the comfy armchairs in the lounge instead of the floor to distance myself from these objects. *What is this teacher thinking?* I asked myself. *We’re graduate students. I haven’t touched pipe cleaners since elementary school.* Before I allowed my anxiety-ridden imagination to run wild with possibilities, the teacher



Figure 1: My relationship to composing in teaching with technology: A multimodal approach. Image by author.

addressed the class: “Using the materials on the floor, I want you to recreate your understanding of your composing process.”

While at first glance this exercise seemed like a simplistic approach to critical reflection, this prompt and these materials challenged me to think about my process in new and exciting ways. From the materials to the arrangement and analysis of the relationships each object or place holds in relation to the other, I was challenged to think about myself alongside the way my invention moves. I was also challenged to consider how both an understanding of my process and the materials necessary to embody it come together, working synchronously to enact an incisive understanding of the material and social considerations that are always in flux with composing.

Looking back, it was hard for me to begin this assignment because of the multiple ways by which I could approach the prompt. Typically, the demands of our classrooms adhere to certain genre conventions and expectations, asking

students to respond in writing as we reflect or contend with prompts that call for an understanding of our metacognition. While this snapshot of my product shows the result of my engagement with that assignment, it is in the process of making, understanding, and visualizing that I understood how my relationship to composing is enacted (fig. 1). As Wysocki argued, it is the rhetorical agency of choosing the tools with which we engage in order to design, compose, or perform in ways so as not to flatten the assemblage of such components that truly allows us to engage and understand the materiality of our texts.

What’s important to remember is that in reflecting on this project or others like it, my audience does not get to see my process. They don’t receive any insight into my frustration or my difficulty in choosing materials, with several bent pipe cleaners and discarded cotton balls circling around me. As is true for writing, teachers often only see our finished product. Whether our end products are monomodal or multimodal, it is important

to understand and develop a process-oriented approach to composing—one which unpacks the material, social, and cultural considerations present within our epistemologies. As such, this article explores the ways in which all writing processes are inherently multimodal by taking time to unpack historical conversations and contemporary approaches concerning multimodality and writing processes within the field of composition studies.

2. Understanding Process: History, Critique, and Implicit Multimodal Undertones

Within the field of composition studies, generous attention has been paid to the ways in which we approach writing as a process. This approach to writing has been so powerful and influential that scholars such as Joe Harris (2012) have argued that it helped to establish composition as a research field. Thus, the enactments of process theory vary based on focus. While James Berlin (1987) counted four particular strands (classists, positivists, expressionists, and new rhetorical or adherents of new or “epistemic” rhetoric), Harris identified particular process thinking frameworks recognized by both Lester Faigley and Patricia Bizzell as expressive, cognitive, and social (Harris, 2012, p.74). Regardless of the angle scholars’ frame process theory within, it is important to understand the ways in which all process theory approaches are inherently multimodal.

One of the most influential articles concerning process theory is Donald Murray’s “Teaching Writing as Process Not Product.” Murray (1972) argued that process could be divided into three stages: prewriting, writing, and rewriting (p. 4). While this approach seems overly reductive and formulaic in suggesting that writing happens only in three stages, it is important to understand how Murray was the first scholar to really engage in an emphasis on process and prewriting, stating “in prewriting, the writer focuses on that subject, spots an audience, chooses a form which may carry his subject to his audience” (p. 4).

As I reflect on my own engagement with thinking through my own process, my instructor conflated Murray’s stages of process, instead asking us to use prewriting as a way to enact what would become a final product. Rather than approaching such writing processes as chronological, the attuned focus on the materiality of representing our writing using the assets available to us asked to enact such stages simultaneously, engaging in “rewriting” in swapping out materials like cotton balls for pipe cleaners and red for blue marker alongside the prewriting. Though Murray engaged explicitly in the written word in his discussion of process theory, it is significant that he alluded to choosing a form, perhaps opening up space for the possibility that particular modes beyond the alphabetic may be more appropriate and productive for a particular composer and audience.

To expand upon this notion, Murray's third implication for implementing process theory advocated that as composers, students are always enacting their own language (Murray, 1972, p. 5). As I have argue together with Kristin Arola in "Tracing the Turn: The Rise of Multimodal Composition in the U.S." (2016), Kenneth Burke's (1969) discussion of rhetoric as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation, and in defining humans as beings that by nature respond to symbols opens up dynamic possibilities for how we might come to know language beyond the alphabetic, stating, "the question of how humans respond to symbols of all kinds is, in essence, a multimodal concern" (Johnson & Arola, p. 100). Burke's definition of rhetoric allows us to see persuasion beyond the merely alphabetic—as when an audience understands the visual rhetoric of the color red as aggressive or confrontational—which Murray's discussion implicitly suggests.

Murray's argument that we cannot teach writing as a product is central to the aim that "students find their own way to their own truth" (p. 6). It is through the process of discovery and invention that voice and style are cultivated, Murray argued, suggesting that within the classroom, teachers should step back and allow the student room to interpret and develop their own approaches to prompts and assignments. To be too overly authoritative stifles both process and product. As my own personal example illustrates, these enactments can at times be uncomfortable and can push the

boundaries of what we conceive of as academic writing. However, in doing this work, students are challenged to reflect on their own identities as writers. Not only does this work ask teachers to shy away from overt instruction and modeling approaches to composing, but it also engages students in an expansive understanding of forms, taking time to unpack how visual, aural, or kinesthetic modes can be cultivated alongside one another as both the process and product of our composition.

While historical discussions concerning process theory have grappled primarily with alphabetic texts, there are scholars in the field of composition studies that explicitly discuss the importance of a multimodal approach. Perhaps one of the scholars most known for their advocacy of seeing multimodality as an inherent part of process is Jason Palmeri. In *Remixing Composition: A History of Multimodal Writing Pedagogy* (2012), Palmeri traced the threads of multimodality that have always been present within the field of composition studies. Zooming in on process theory during 1971-1984, Palmeri argued that process theory has always been embedded in cultivating multiple modes as a way to make meaning. Palmeri states, "process researchers conceptualized alphabetic writing as a deeply multimodal thinking process that shares affinities with other forms of composing (visual, musical, spatial, gestural)" (p. 25). Like Burke, Palmeri also saw language as a symbol system that transcends the alphabetic. However, there is a difference between thinking and doing. While scholars may

have stressed the inherent multimodal cognitive strategies central to engaging in process, asking our students (and ourselves) to do such work is still fairly new.

In situating these efforts as a way to move from simply thinking about multimodality to understanding what the practices of a multimodal process approach might look like, Palmeri identifies two interdisciplinary questions that still hold relevance for multimodal theorists today: whether or not there are similarities in composing processes throughout a variety of humanities disciplines and what weight nonverbal modes might hold within the invention and revising strategies of alphabetic texts. (p. 25). Though much of Palmeri's historical discussions of multimodality within the process movement centered around nonverbal modes as invention and alphabetic text as product, Ann Berthoff's (1982) use of visual mental images begins to do the work of conflating the two as a decidedly process-based approach where, "visual perception is itself a form of composing. As we look at the world and compose visual images in our minds, we are constantly making meaning by selecting, arranging, and classifying" (39).

In working with the imagination, Palmeri argued, "Berthoff shows that the process of composing mental images—the process of visual thinking—is analogous to writing" (39). It is in these associations of how we might come to conceptualize the act of thinking beyond the written word to the act of doing or inventing these processes in their material form that we

truly enact multimodal writing processes. In returning to my own enactment, the "product" or representation of my process embodies the types of composing strategies advocated by Berthoff and Palmeri—showcasing a visual imagery of how and where I imagine myself as I grapple with meaning making and material resources to compose for a particular audience (fig. 1). In order to produce a product that exemplified my process, I had to rely on my mental imagery of both place and action. Questions like, where do I do my best thinking? What do resources or tools do I need in order to cultivate an approach? ask me to not only rely on memory, but also imagination as I find ways to visually duplicate the places and resources needed for me to make meaning. It is in these transitions between the cognitive and material enactment that multimodality truly becomes a process of composing.

Another scholar contending with multimodality and process is Jody Shipka. In *Toward a Composition Made Whole*, Shipka (2011) discussed the important elements that contribute to process, beginning with the invention surrounding how ideas and material factors play into how we understand multimodal theory. Like Palmeri, Shipka first chronicled a historical discussion of process, but rather than discuss its movements, focused on how critiques of process theory have historically been implemented within two generations. The first generation centers on critiques concerning whether or not process theory produces writing in isolation, and in doing so, if we might be

teaching more toward a heuristic of writing, rather than the notion that *within* the process of composing, critical thinking and voice are constructed and developed. Harris also discussed this assertion of teaching process as a heuristic, in which he argued, “the process you teach turns out to depend on the sort of product you want. The effort of process teaching thus becomes not an opening up of multiple ways of writing but an inculcating of a particular method of composing” (90). It is interesting to consider such assertions alongside Murray’s formulaic approach to composing, suggesting that in limiting students to particular “stages” we might in turn be constricting both process and product.

To combat such concerns centering on *how* to teach process, Harris argued that in looking at the genre and form of our texts, we should urge students to move from a more writer-based approach to reader-based, understanding how process must “go beyond the text to include a sense of the ongoing conversations that texts enter into” (pp. 90-91). As such, this attention to the cultural and social elements within a given rhetorical situation surrounding the text further stress the relevance of the material elements surrounding the composing process. These assertions from Harris expand upon earlier critiques made by Faigley (2002). In looking at the branches of process theory, Faigley stressed the troubling universal claims about writing made by cognitive approaches to process (see Flower and Hayes, 1981). Referencing Bizzell (1982) Faigley attempted to answer the question

“what do we need to know about writing?” in his critique Bizzell’s inner-directed and outer-directed approach. He argued,

Bizzell uses “outer-directed” theory to demonstrate the shortcoming of cognitive “inner-directed” theory...because “inner-directed” theorists seek to isolate the “invariant” thinking process involved in composing, Bizzell claims that “inner-directed” theorists consider the how of composing at the expense of asking why writers make certain decisions. Answers to the latter question Bizzell insists, must come not from the mind of the individual writer, but from the ways of making meaning in a particular community. (p. 31)

Ultimately advocating for an “outer-directed” approach to process, Bizzell claimed that “thinking and language can never occur free of a social context that conditions them” (Bizzell qtd. in Faigley p. 31). Like Shipka and Harris, Faigley and Bizzell’s assertions that all writing is social offers an inherent focus on the material elements present within a particular rhetorical situation that contribute to how texts are cultivated and constructed within our writing processes. Though Harris and Shipka ultimately both approached process theory as inherently social, Shipka is one of the first to explicitly tie this connection to multimodal theory as rooted within the material. In doing so, she argued that aesthetics in any community we inhabit impacts composing “by asking students to examine the communicative process as a dynamic, embodied, multimodal whole—

one that both shapes and is shaped by the environment” (p. 26).

This focus on materiality and multimodality within process theory is important. Shipka’s argument that process is deeply rooted in ecology of place and material aesthetics is an assertion I feel I embodied as I reflect on my own my process as not only rooted in place, but also material objects and actions. Whether it is through the corporeal action (like taking a shower) or object (such as having a glass of wine), the invention of my cognitive process is rooted in my ability to rely on a material multimodal approach to composing, one that cultivates place, action, and object—using my body as a compass to guide me through both thinking and making.

Whereas Harris suggested our writing becomes part of a larger conversation, my visual map of process was done largely in isolation, relying on the material aesthetics of my surroundings to help me work through ideas (fig. 1). Looking toward the particular threads of process theory, such approaches weave between expressive and cognitive movements—aligning with the theoretical frameworks of scholars such as Peter Elbow, Linda Flower, and John Hayes. In understanding these approaches, Bizzell’s “inner-directed” approach encouraged internal strategies for invention, seeing writing as a deeply personal act, which is a framework that enacts Murray’s notion of a writers “own truth” (6). However, as Faigley reminded us, writing does not exist in a vacuum, and even if we are enacting our process independently of others, others such as

Shipka stressed we are still mediated by complex networks of tools and material considerations (p. 41).

Though Palmeri does not explicitly engage in critiques of process theory, his historical framing of process is useful to position alongside Shipka’s focus on historical critiques of how to enact process-based pedagogy in the classroom. In doing so, Palmeri argued alongside Berthoff that “teachers should build upon the knowledge of composing that students already bring with them to the classroom” (p. 40). Such arguments concerning the need for a pedagogy that bridges the gap between home and classroom composing and literacy practices have been made previously by others in the field (see Selfe, 2009; Yancey, 2004; George, 2002). However, such considerations seem to overwhelmingly center on tools as mediation between home and classroom rather than modes beyond the alphabetic as semiotic meaning making systems. In addressing the affordances of modes beyond the written word, Palmeri again referenced Berthoff’s pedagogical approaches to multimodality, arguing,

By focusing the teaching of composition on harnessing the “active mind” of the student rather than on evaluating the formal correctness of alphabetic products, Berthoff ultimately seeks to develop a composition pedagogy that could enable students to draw connections among—and develop a vocabulary for—all the carried ways they make meaning in their lives. (p. 40)

But how does this translate to different

genres and acts of composing? To address this, Palmeri situated interdisciplinary stake process theory has in contending with the arts, and other humanities disciplines. If we are to cultivate students meaning making activities, then this must extend to all available avenues and disciplines. Palmeri illustrated this practice in the following example:

If a student, for example, has already come to appreciate the fact that she could generate ideas through the process of sculpting, then that student might be encouraged to transfer her understanding of sculpting as a process of discovery to considering writing as a process of discovery. (p. 40)

These sentiments voiced by both Palmeri and Berthoff echo Shipka's argument that not only is all composing multimodal, but also that multimodality is rooted in process—necessarily considering the material elements of available resources in how meaning is invented and subsequently constructed. Of the twelve graduate students enrolled in our Multimodal Approach to Teaching with Technology seminar, it is useful to consider how many students may have taken effortlessly to the assignment to enact their process using unconventional “writing” materials; while others like myself were initially incredibly overwhelmed and stumped as to what were the expectations laid out by the teacher, and how I might go about materializing my own composing process.

Graduate students (and all writers really) are shaped by both public and

academic discourses that contribute to our meaning making systems. What's important to consider in Palmeri's assertion is the acknowledgment that epistemology is inherently interdisciplinary, we do not make meaning through letters or numbers alone and as a result, considerations and encouragement of multimodality as part of student's process is ultimately calling upon them to use the tools they know to understand and articulate information that may be initially unfamiliar. We need to do more to put this pedagogy back into conversation with the theoretical concepts that inform our work as scholars. Of equal importance, we need to consider the ways in which these theories need to be enacted in not only how we think about composing, but also how we actually ask our students to do this work in our classrooms.

In returning to Shipka's discussion of historical approaches, the second wave of process theory critique builds off of the assertion that all writing is social and epistemological; critiquing the first wave that writer cannot be removed from reality in understanding process. However, Shipka recognized an inherent contradiction in what we advocate and what is actually enacted, and that in this focus on writing as social, Syverson (1999) argued “while we have, for some time now, worked to enlarge the unit of analysis in composition beyond the individual—through studies of collaborative writing and through ethnographic projects, for example—we have continued to focus on readers,

writers, and texts as independent objects” (Syverson qtd. in Shipka pp. 34-35). In order to address the contradiction presented by Syverson, Shipka discussed the inclusion of technology as a communicative tool to bridge these different components.

Just as new communication technologies have enlivened and provided a sense of urgency to discussions about where the discipline is headed and what our use of terms like *authoring*, *writing* and *composing* include or describe, recent changes to the communicative landscape have contributed to an interest in tracing the material dimensions of literacy. (p. 35)

Such technologies, Shipka argued, make our material processes more visible. It is in these tools that our dynamic relationship to composing embodies choice and agency to be more concise of the material elements possible within a dynamic composing landscape.

These resources need not be digital in order to better convey the materiality of our processes of composing. Consider that of the materials presented on the floor of my graduate seminar, my agency as author may have experimented and considered (and even used at a particular stage) elements such as pipe cleaners and cotton balls; however, different textures and colors of paper and ink are the material resources I ended up using within the final product of my composition because they seemed safe and more in tune with materials that I already associated with composing. How might I have approached

my process differently had I been able to use my laptop, or camera? While there is value in familiar tools, there is also value in learning from seeing analog assets as an inherent part of our literacy and composing practices.

Relying primarily on Sarah Sloane (1999) Shipka stated that “research methods have not often enough considered the myriad influences that shape writers’ choices” (p. 35). These influences in conjunction with technology are often material because, as Sloane argued, “writing technologies, especially computers, are themselves haunted by earlier versions of textuality, speaking, authoring, and reading” (Sloane qtd. in Shipka p. 35). What this means, is that rather than viewing our composing process as solely a meaning-making activity, as authors (and teachers) we must also consider available resources in order to do so. We are always creating meaning through available resources, many of which enact modes beyond alphabetic, calling for new approaches to composing that stress the materiality within a particular rhetorical situation in which we ask students to compose.

3. Explicit Enactments: Seeing Multimodality as a Material Process

Thinking about materiality alongside process within multimodal theory necessarily leads one toward a conversation concerning tools. As briefly mentioned previously, while digital tools provide a vast array of possibilities for

multiple modes and resources, Shipka argued that conceiving of multimodality under an overtly digital lens can be problematic.

I am not suggesting that newer technologies have made little difference in classroom practice or students' lives... While I remain both cognizant of and optimistic about the ways newer technologies promise to impact our research, scholarship, and pedagogical practice, a composition made whole requires us to be more mindful about our use of a term like *technology*. We need to consider what is at stake—who and what it is that we empower or discount—when we use the term to mean primarily, or worse yet, only the newest computer technologies and not light switches, typewriters, eyeglasses, handwriting, or floor tiles as well. (pp. 20-21)

If we are truly to conceive of multimodality and process as inherently linked, then we must come to expand our conceptions of available resources—understanding the ways in which bodies, places, and actions can all be cultivated as resources for contending with and enacting multimodality as process. Like Shipka, Wysocki advocated for a similar emphasis to materiality and new media texts, stressing the inherent focus on the materiality of the making in the final product. In doing so, Wysocki and Shipka stressed digital tools as one option for enacting a multimodal framework that considers materiality, in Wysocki advocated that not all new media texts necessarily have to be digital in order to

embody the material and inherently social threads they advocate (p. 15).

In a slightly different approach to Wysocki, Shipka pulled from James Wertsch's (1991) framework of "mediated action" for attending to "the wide range of representational systems and technologies with which composers work and to examine the role that perceptions, purposes, motives, and institutions, as well as other people and activities play in the production, reception, circulation, and valuation of that work" (p. 40). For Wertsch, rather than seeing tools, humans, and society as separate entities, we must come to understand how all of these components function as a unit, which Shipka expands upon to argue makes multimodality an inherently material activity because we are forced to consider factors such as posture and lighting alongside other agents (p. 42).

As a result, Shipka tweaked the expanded mediated action framework implemented by Wertsch, to consider such materiality, coining the approach as "tool-equipped mediated action", positioning it as "a way of guarding against the tendency to focus on the isolated individual when trying to understand the forces that shape human action" (p. 42). Framing the components that contribute to the materiality of how modes, media, and community work together synchronously is helpful in not only the process of composing, but also understanding how bodies are implicated as both resource and obstacle.

In understanding the role of bodies within our composing process, Shipka

offered the following:

The habitual use of any tool brings about “amplifications and reductions” not only in the moment of use but in the physical and psychological structure of the user. In this way, our analyses need to examine not only how the introduction of new meditational means impacts the activity in which one engages, but how it impacts or alters the body and an individual’s relationship with his or her body. (p. 51)

Shipka’s attention to affect encourages us to consider the ways in which tools and environments have an effect on our bodies, and how the material manifestations of multimodality may in turn, affect the process we enact. In looking at my end product, attention to affect in both place—where I needed to be in order to invent and arrange—and tools I needed in order to compose is displayed in the bright colored paper that encompassed by expressions of my body within each particular stage. As I continue to embody my process with a linear sequence of shifting tools and locations, my emotional response modifies based on those interdependent relationships of mind, body, and place, as well as the role my body plays in my environments and relationships to objects and people (see fig.1).

Looking toward affect and the ways in which the body complicates our conceptions of materiality and multimodality, Joddy Murray (2009) argued “it is imperative to view emotions as necessary, even essential, both in terms

of process and product” (p. 102). While scholars such as Bizzell (1981) and Faigley (1992) claimed that emotions have strong ties to an inner-directed process that relies on cognitive or expressive approaches, Murray argued that emotions are a visceral reaction to “social networks wherein writers exist” (p. 91). However, with the inclusion of technology as not only tools for composing, but also channels to distribute and circulate texts, the body and our processes can often become invisible in relation to those networks. In an outer-directed engagement with the body, Jonathan Alexander and Jackie Rhodes (2014) reflected on putting their bodies into the forefront of digital texts within the digital multimodal composition of a visual conference presentation titled *Viewmaster*. Rather than composing a traditional conference paper, Alexander and Rhodes instead chose a more unconventional approach to presenting, in which they argued that the “notion of the ‘composed’ text, often go hand in hand with notions of the ‘composed’ body, the disciplined ‘subject,’ the individual submitting work that falls inevitably under scrutiny, a gaze” (p. 11). *Viewmaster* primarily depicted both Alexander and Rhodes’ eyes alongside rhetorical questions and quotes—asking viewing to gaze back at the hybridity of image and text, understanding the ways in which bodies are used as both a tool and an argument in the multimodal construction of their installation. As such, Alexander and Rhodes argued that their intention behind the medium was to “provoke consideration of the often unremarked,

frequently unacknowledged pressures that surround the act of composition” (pp. 9-10). What is compelling to consider in their assertion is their attention to composing as an “act”, suggesting that our notion of “text” as something to be performed or embodied. In viewing composing under this gaze, materiality must be considered as a fundamental component inherent within multimodal process, for preforming and assembling with the body in focus calls upon both affect and mode.

Viewing multimodal composing as embodied an act is powerful in considering the role of both discourse and production. In considering the role of materiality in all stages of a text, Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen (2001) looked at both the process of multimodal composing and the product that is preformed, designed, or constructed—understanding how audience is implicated within both the invention and distribution of texts. Kress and Van Leeuwen identify four particular stages of multimodal communication: discourse, design, production, and distribution. Beginning with discourse is important to consider when positioning first generation critiques of process theory alongside contemporary approaches to multimodality. While scholars in the field of composition studies have argued that all writing is social, Kress and Van Leeuwen enacted that avocation under a heuristic that positions “all the semiotic modes which are available as means of realizations in a particular culture are drawn on in that culture as a

means of the articulation of discourses” (p. 24).

What this means is that the modes we engage are the result of the discourses we are a part of, echoing arguments made previously by both Berthoff and Palmeri. But unlike Berthoff and Palmeri, Kress and Van Leeuwen argued experiences encountered within discourse are “physical, physiological, even though it is of course culturally mediated through culturally given systems of evaluation” (p. 28). As such, discourse is not only an enactment of modes, but also an overtly material experience, one in which implicates affect and bodies as visceral responses to culture and discourse.

Whereas discourse is rooted in the invention and exploration of modes, culture, and affect, the design stage of multimodal communication for Kress and Van Leeuwen deals with the material representation and engagement with information. In their discussion, Kress and Van Leeuwen described design as “a blueprint for production” that not only considers modes, culture, and community, but also starts to consider the organization and construction of the text (p. 50). Both discourse and design are involved in the process of composing which ask the composer to not only draw from the social sphere of discourse but to also call upon modes and affect to contend with how the composition becomes arranged.

On the other hand, Kress and Van Leeuwen’s notions of production and distribution are more concerned with the

tools and circulation of the composition as opposed to the invention and arrangement. Unlike other multimodal theorists, Kress and Van Leeuwen separated invention from tool, in which they argued, “production is the communicative use of *media*, of *material* resources” (p. 66). Unlike discourse, which situates experience as both material and social, production utilizes affect and the material as operating under the following assumption.

Production is always physical work, whether by humans or machines, a physical job of articulating a “text”. And the interpretation of production is also physical work, a use of the body (the sensory organs). Production media are closely associated with different sensory channels, because each medium is characterized by a particular configuration of material qualities, and each of these material qualities is grasped by a particular set of sensory organs. (p. 66)

While material implications of experience are deeply rooted in the social, physical experiences of production are cultivated from a more internal place. To build off of this notion, distribution cultivates the materials used and the modes implored within the production phase and looks toward media as channels for dissemination. At this stage the medium is the prime consideration as text become “re-coded” for particular media channels and discourses. Think, for instance of how my visual map of my process of composing might be distributed

as a handout, what “re-coding” or reproduction rhetorical moves would need to be implemented to make that text successful within a different discourse or genre? Under this scaffolded framework, Kress and Van Leeuwen saw the material as foundational to multimodal composing, stressing the engagement of our bodily perceptions, experiences, and reactions to different social, technological, and cultural encounters.

4. Conclusion: Seeing Multimodality as (Always) Material

Whether it is tracing the historical roots of process theory within the field or looking closely at more contemporary manifestations, it is important to understand the ways in which we are always engaging in a multimodal process. Multimodal scholars like Palmeri and Shipka do important work in conceptualizing the ways those scholars who may not have explicitly engaged with multimodal theory have been enacting it all along. However, what is important to remember is that while we may be implicitly engaging in multimodal process, we are not necessarily aware of it. Making multimodality more visible within process makes students feel more comfortable in breaking away from alphabetic texts.

As I reflect on this experience in my graduate education and how I was challenged to compose dynamically out of initial discomfort, I wonder how multimodal assignments prior to this graduate seminar might have made me

more confident to approach this assignment. Would I still fear the materials I was asked to engage with in that one course? Though these approaches are advocated during adolescent education, we seem to make troubling movements away from them as we continue to grow and become more involved in culture, experience, and perception. I argue instead that our pedagogies and composing processes should make intentional moves that acknowledge the inherent multimodal nature to all writing. We need to stress the relevance for all assets as rhetorically rich material components to authoring. Whether it is the body, acrylic paint, or a digital camera. We need to ask our students to think about how place, affect, and community contribute to how they write, when they write, and what they use.

Rather than asking students to shy away from a multimodal approach to process theory, we should give equal weight to the multimodal products we often ask them to produce. As with our own scholarship, we need to think about our own engagements with writing and we need to put it back into conversations with the theory. Does what we do mirror what we advocate as scholars? Many teachers and scholars in the field see nonverbal modes as modes that carry equal weight alongside writing. We need to make sure we stress this in not only the products we create, but also the process we ask ourselves and our students to enact. Otherwise, to not do so renders the material bodies, aesthetics,

and objects that composers engage with invisible.

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Have Your Epideictic Rhetoric, and Eat It, Too

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This article examines how an “occasional cake”—a cake decorated to celebrate a birthday or other event—is an example of epideictic rhetoric and a potential medium for activism. I support this claim with observations from a personal case study, decorating birthday cakes for a charitable nonprofit that provides personalized birthday parties for children experiencing homelessness. In this process, I discovered that the multimodality of the cakes was a significant factor in making a compelling claim that these children’s lives are worth acknowledging and celebrating. I suggest that the making of activist, epideictic, occasional cakes is a potential multimodal composition assignment that would invite students to consider mode and process, cultural values, and relational ethics. In addition to its pedagogical implications, this study demonstrates the importance of investigating the potential of non-digital mediums for making activist arguments.

Introduction

When you make someone a birthday cake, you tell this person that she is valued and her life is worth celebrating. I learned this from my mother, who insists that every birthday be celebrated and every birthday celebration involve a cake bearing the celebratee’s name and an appropriate number of lit candles, which the celebratee blows out while loved ones sing off-key. Wishing is optional.

I started learning how to bake and decorate cakes when I was a teenager, and I have decorated “occasional cakes”—cakes decorated to celebrate birthdays and other events—for family and friends ever since. Although I have always appreciated

the role of occasional cakes in various celebrations, it was not until after a decade of baking and decorating occasional cakes that I learned how cakes can function as a type of communicative discourse: epideictic rhetoric.

In *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle differentiates between epideictic rhetoric and the two other branches of rhetoric—judicial¹ and deliberative—by the time they reference (trans. 2007, 1358b). Judicial rhetoric refers to past events, for which it solicits judgments; deliberative rhetoric refers to future events and proposes actions to either help the events occur or prevent them; and epideictic rhetoric refers to

¹ Judicial rhetoric is often referred to as “forensic” rhetoric; however, in his translation of Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric* (2007), George A. Kennedy recommends

avoiding the use of “forensic,” as an inappropriate interpretation (p. 47).

current events and seeks agreement about their honorable or dishonorable nature. Epideictic rhetoric characterizes genres such as eulogies, letters of recommendation, and the Best Man's speech at a wedding, all of which use a particular current event to praise or blame one's values.

Although common in American and other national popular cultures, occasional cakes are not frequently identified among the common examples of epideictic rhetoric, and yet, this type of cake achieves the same rhetorical function as a congratulatory speech. For example, Figure 1 depicts a cake that celebrates my sister's high school graduation. The text alone demonstrates praise, and the colors of the frosting match those of her destination university, further highlighting her achievements. Like a commencement speech might, the cake "praises" her for her past accomplishments and looks with hope upon her future.

Just as occasional cakes might be dismissed as potential mediums for rhetorical arguments, the significance and usefulness of epideictic rhetoric is also debated. Of Aristotle's three branches of rhetoric—deliberative, judicial, and epideictic—epideictic is the most likely to be dismissed as "mere" rhetoric: "artificial,' 'contrived,' and 'irrelevant'... 'empty rhetoric'" (Sheard, p. 766). However, several researchers have argued against this dismissal, claiming that inherent in epideictic rhetoric is the potential for civic contribution or activism (Sheard, 1996; Agnew, 2008; Richards, 2009; Bostdorff and Ferris, 2014).

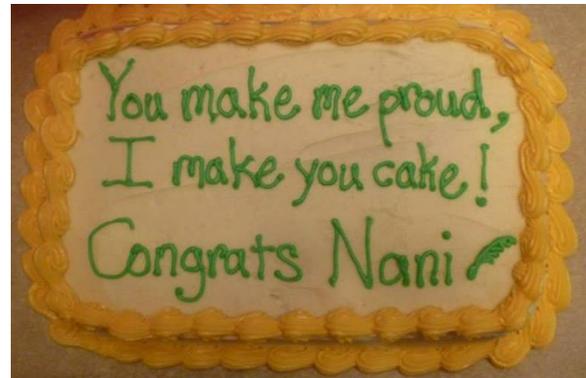


Figure 1: My sister's graduation cake uses a pun to demonstrate the relationship between epideictic rhetoric and cake. Source: personal collection.

In this article, I seek to extend previous claims about the civic potential of epideictic rhetoric: I argue that the activist component of epideictic rhetoric is more compelling in a multimodal composition than in epideictic arguments that comprise one mode, particularly when representing the values of marginalized groups. That is, because the voices of marginalized groups are often silenced or ignored, any representation of their values is best communicated through a rhetorical use of material and spatial elements as well as textual. To support this claim, I demonstrate how occasional cakes qualify as an example of epideictic rhetoric. Then I describe a personal case study in which I decorated birthday cakes for a charitable nonprofit called Extra-Ordinary Birthdays, which provides personalized birthday parties for children experiencing homelessness. Finally, I address the pedagogical implications of this study, suggesting a multimodal project to help composition students consider processes for addressing rhetorical decisions in activist contexts. In addition to these

pedagogical implications, this study demonstrates the importance of investigating the potential of non-digital mediums for making activist arguments.

Civic Contribution is the Icing on the Cake

Effective epideictic rhetoric can assist a rhetor in the pursuit of social change. In “The Public Value of Epideictic Rhetoric” (1996), Cynthia Sheard demonstrates that one of the roles of epideictic rhetoric is to invoke and therefore inspire the values of a community (771). For example, when a eulogy praises the recently deceased for his generosity and open-mindedness, it asserts that these are admirable values and persuades the audience to be generous and open-minded as well. Sheard claims that by praising or blaming certain values, epideictic rhetoric can stimulate change in a community.

Extending Sheard’s claims about the civic potential of epideictic rhetoric, other scholars have noted historical examples of how epideictic rhetoric was used to challenge norms and promote new community values, rather than affirm the prevailing cultural norms. In “Inventing Sacagawea: Public Women and the Transformative Potential of Epideictic Rhetoric” (2009), Cindy Koenig Richards uses the example of the commemoration of a statue of Sacagawea at the 1905 World’s Fair by members of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Noting that Sacagawea’s contributions to the Lewis and Clark expedition had been largely ignored until a

1903 book publication, Richards argues that NAWSA made an epideictic argument that not only promoted the suffragist community’s values but also attempted to challenge normalized racism, with a statue and dedication ceremony that “presented an American Indian woman as an icon of American identity and progress” (p. 3).

Then, using the example of an American president’s commencement speech, in “John F. Kennedy at American University: The Rhetoric of the Possible, Epideictic Progression, and the Commencement of Peace” (2014), Denise M. Bostdorff and Shawna H. Ferris claim that epideictic rhetoric can achieve the opposite of praising cultural norms and rather “transform listeners’ perceptions of reality” (p. 409). Bostdorff and Ferris describe how President John F. Kennedy used his 1963 commencement speech at American University to appeal to his listeners to consider the possibility of peace (and more specifically, a nuclear test-ban treaty) with the U.S.S.R. Kennedy’s impassioned appeal for peace was especially significant because the success of the speech depended, in part, on his ability to override the confrontational and anticommunist sentiments of his previous public addresses. That is, Kennedy’s speech not only challenged the existing cultural norms, but it also challenged the values that he had previously helped to normalize.

Finally, in an example of activist epideictic rhetoric that blamed rather than praised, in “‘The Day Belongs to the Students:’ Expanding Epideictic’s Civic

Function” (2008), Lois Agnew explains how an invited speaker for the 2003 Rockford College commencement address used the opportunity to publicly denigrate U.S. entry into the Iraq War. Agnew then describes the dramatic backlash from the audience, and how the speech and the event itself became national news items, spurring additional political debate. Agnew claims that the provocative commencement speech exemplifies the potential of epideictic rhetoric to challenge cultural norms and shared values, in an attempt to “create a new vision of the world” (p. 161).

Sheard, Richards, Bostdorff and Ferris, and Agnew demonstrate that epideictic rhetoric does so much more than reaffirm cultural values—epideictic rhetoric interrogates, contests, and even directly opposes dominant cultural values. To support this claim, these critics draw on historical examples; that is, these scholars focus on the products of different epideictic compositions. However, they do not necessarily break down the composition process itself, which I believe deserves further study.

Furthermore, two of the historical examples (the college commencement addresses) inhabited one mode: speech. The statue commemoration Richards studied can be described as a multimodal composition, given that she analyzed the rhetorical significance of both its verbal (speeches) and visual (the statue itself, draped in an American flag) components. However, Richards’s analysis of the statue commemoration does not reflect on the

significance of different modes working together to create an epideictic argument.

To address these gaps in the literature, I draw on insights from food rhetoric, rhetoric of cake rituals and cake performances, and embodiment in multimodal composition to demonstrate how the multimodality of occasional cakes help craft an epideictic argument. Subsequently, I describe the process of composing an epideictic cake that performs a civic function.

Proving It’s Epideictic is a Piece of Cake

In Sheard’s article, she attributes six characteristics to epideictic rhetoric:

We can say that epideictic is educative, that it is in many ways ritualistic, that it elicits judgment, that it can initiate, support, influence, or lend closure to other modes of discourse, and we should add not only that it participates in reality at critical moments in time but that it interprets and represents one reality for the purpose of positing and inspiring a new one (790).

Each of these characteristics applies to occasional cakes. It is important to note that cakes created merely to demonstrate the decorator’s skill, such as competitive cakes, are not epideictic. For example, the cake depicted in Figure 2 might elicit judgment about the decorator’s skill, but the cake does not make an argument to praise virtue or condemn vice.



Figure 2: I made this chocolate monster for a cake decorating competition, so it is not an example of epideictic rhetoric. Source: personal collection.

OCCASIONAL CAKES ARE EDUCATIVE

The theme, text, and even the flavor of a cake should teach the audience about the celebratee's interests and the reason for celebrating. This is similar to a Best Man's speech, which typically includes personal anecdotes about one or both of the newlyweds, before praising virtues apparent in the newlyweds' relationship. Like a Best Man's speech, the cake in Figure 3 is educative. The text and the symbolism of the balloon and gift indicate that a birthday is being celebrated. Furthermore, the absence of a licensed character (common on children's birthday cakes) and presence of a mustache and robot demonstrate my niece's creativity and maturing affection for alternative pop culture trends. Finally, the cakes were chocolate, which teaches the primary audience (i.e., the partygoers at my niece's first sleepover party) something about my niece's preferences and personal taste.

The connection between the educative possibility of food and the representation of an individual's values is a common



Figure 3: To celebrate my niece on her 10th birthday, I decorated two cakes as a mustachioed robot and a plushie monster. Source: personal collection.

theme of food rhetoric scholarship. For example, in the foreword to *The Rhetoric of Food: Discourse, Materiality, and Power* (2012), Raymie E. McKerrow describes how even the way one speaks about food can educate one's audience about his or her values: "[H]ow we frame our conversations about food...conveys a wealth of information about who we are" (p. xii). Likewise, one's food choices, such as meat consumption or a vegan lifestyle, also communicates information about one's values, although McKerrow warns against making imprecise assumptions (p. xii).

Thus, in *Political Appetites: Food as Rhetoric in American Politics* (2013), Alison Perelman discusses how Governor Mitt Romney's campaign staff and national news media monitored the Republican presidential nominee's eating habits to identify potential insights into his cultural and spiritual values, during both the 2008 and 2012 primaries. The Romney campaign tried to represent the candidate as an all-American man, and presumably, the cultural standard for an all-American

man involves unhealthy eating choices. Despite the campaign's efforts, journalists reported that the candidate maintained a healthy diet; even when he ordered unhealthy food items, he modified them to reduce the calories, such as removing the skin from fried chicken and the cheese from pizza (p. 136). The candidate's avoidance of caffeine was also of interest to the general public, because any consumption of caffeine signaled the extent to which Romney did or did not conform with the requirements of his Mormon religion (p. 136). As food items, cakes also possess this potential to educate an audience about the values of the people receiving and serving the cake, even apart from the potential of occasional cakes to communicate a specifically epideictic message.

OCCASIONAL CAKES ARE RITUALISTIC

My mother's insistence that birthdays need cakes is hardly unusual. In popular culture, cakes are frequently associated with celebrating milestone events in a person's life, such as birthdays, weddings, graduations, anniversaries, and retirement, as well as for celebrating the milestones of organizations. There are rituals for presenting and serving cakes at these events, such as newlywed couples cutting their own cake and smash cakes for first birthdays. Entire movie plots are written around the rule that you make a wish when you blow out the candle and if you tell anyone, it won't come true.² In

² According to Marietta Rusinek (2012), the ritual of lighting candles on cakes goes back to the ancient Greeks, who made round cakes to resemble a full

addition to cultural traditions, people bring their own rituals to celebratory cakes. I know a family who has pineapple-upside-down cake for every single birthday. I have adopted my parents' tradition that after the birthday person blows out his or her candles, you re-light one candle for the youngest person in the room to extinguish, to resounding applause.

One of the foundational works on the development and meaning of cake rituals comes from an analysis of wedding cake traditions. In "The Wedding Cake: History and Meanings" (1988), Simon Charsley describes how rituals come to exist and to acquire different meanings and interpretations during their existence. Charsley challenges the assumption that something as luxurious as wedding cake must descend from upper classes, appropriated by average people wishing to imitate royalty. In addition to the cake itself, which "originated amongst country and small-town folk" and was later popularized by Queen Victoria's family, the ritual of cutting the cake had a humble background, with "roots in the urban middle classes of the nineteenth [century], before progressing through the entire society, upwards as well as downwards in the social scale" (p. 239).

Charsley also describes how these rituals evolve to take on new meanings in different times, and most importantly, he notes that it is the materiality and spatiality of cakes that influenced changes

moon in honor of the goddess Artemis, adding candles so the cakes resembled the Moon's glow as well as its shape.

in the rituals and their interpretations. For example, the original eighteenth-century recipe for wedding cake icing was white because its ingredients happened to produce a white color; only later did Victorian society associate the white color of the icing with virginal purity. In another example, the cutting of the wedding cake, which originally was conducted by the bride alone as part of a magic ritual, eventually required the assistance of a second person (i.e., the groom), because the increasingly elaborate constructions of wedding cakes made it too difficult for one person to cut and serve the cake by herself. The ritual of cutting the cake as we know it today was born from an entirely different ritual modified due to material constraints and was then ascribed a new interpretation, as the newlywed couple's "first joint task in life" (p. 240). This will become relevant again in an observation from my case study, when spatial constraints lead to a spontaneous modification of cake rituals.

OCCASIONAL CAKES ELICIT JUDGMENT

Cakes elicit judgment about both the execution of the cake and the celebratee. For example, at the end of each episode of the reality television show *Cake Boss*, the team of bakers reveals a cake worth thousands of dollars and multiple hours of labor, and without fail, the cake elicits gasps of awe and cheers from the client and the client's guests. Many episodes of *Cake Boss* also demonstrate the extent to

which a cake elicits judgment about the intended recipient, such as when the bakery makes a large treasure chest cake for two children who "are a big treasure" (TLC). Posts on *Cake Wrecks*, where the products of alleged professional decorators are mocked, are another example of how cakes elicit judgment (<http://www.cakewrecks.com/>).

In a somewhat disparaging example of the blame function of epideictic occasional cakes, in "Nutritionally 'Empty' but Full of Meanings: The Socio-Cultural Significance of Birthday Cakes in Four Early Childhood Settings" (2015), Deborah Albon describes how parents' requests to bring birthday cakes to their children's nurseries (similar to American daycares or preschools) elicited judgments from the nurseries' staff. Especially when the requests came from working-class families, Albon found that the nurseries' staff forbade homemade cakes (on the grounds of "poor hygiene" in the homes) and criticized the flavor of storebought cakes and other aspects, such as nearness of expiration date (p. 84). Yet, Albon found that all of the staff she interviewed saw the birthday cake "as central to birthday celebrations" (p. 85, emphasis hers). In fact, Albon found that some staff were "particularly vehement in the belief that birthday cakes have a symbolic importance that should not be ignored" (p. 86). One might assume that this "symbolic importance" is the epideictic message that the celebratee be so honored.

OCCASIONAL CAKES INITIATE, SUPPORT, INFLUENCE, OR LEND CLOSURE TO OTHER MODES OF DISCOURSE

If you walk into a conference room where a cake on the table says “Congratulations Rita! Best of Luck on Your Retirement,” you will likely locate Rita and tell her congratulations and wish her luck. This is an example of how a decorated cake initiates (if you weren’t planning to say it already), supports (if you were planning to say it), or influences (maybe you don’t like Rita, but you were moved to deliver one final, good-natured gesture) further discourse.

As demonstrated in the example of school staff judging the ability of working-class families to provide birthday cakes, not only can occasional cakes demonstrate the praise function of epideictic rhetoric, but they can also indicate blame. Insult cakes and troll cakes are examples of cakes that highlight a negative quality of the recipient in order to initiate, support, influence, or lend closure to a mode of discourse (Yates;

<http://www.trollcakes.com/>). For example, the cake depicted in Figure 4 is a troll cake, which highlights one of many indecorous comments made by one of my copyediting clients. I decorated and delivered this cake in an attempt to influence a positive change in my client’s style of discourse for responding to editors’ comments.

One surprising example of how occasional cakes might initiate discourse is found in Albon’s observations of birthday cake practices in British nurseries. Albon observed many young children regularly



Figure 4: This cake highlights an indecorous comment made by a copyediting client.

Source: Personal collection.

playing a game in which they imitated the ritual of presenting a birthday cake (made from “dough, clay, [or] damp sand”), singing “Happy Birthday,” and blowing out candles made from items “such as sticks or pencils” (p. 88). Albon found that the games involved many multilingual children, who “delighted when their name was sung in the ‘Happy Birthday’ song,” in part because their peers had practiced learning and pronouncing their names (p. 88-89). Not only did the performance of actual birthday cakes bring the children together to support one discourse—the honoring of the child being celebrated—but the imitation of that performance had also initiated new discourse between students and helped in the formation of personal relationships.

OCCASIONAL CAKES PARTICIPATE IN REALITY AT CRITICAL MOMENTS IN TIME

As previously discussed, cakes are commonly used to celebrate milestone events, and they “participate” in a number of ways. At a minimum, cakes are enjoyed visually, often as the centerpiece of a party’s decorations, and then by taste,

typically as the grand finale of a meal. The multisensory experience (e.g., by sight, touch, and taste) of producing and receiving cake is part of the cake's rhetoric, as an embodied multimodal composition. In the introduction to the edited collection *Composing Media Composing Embodiment*, Anne Francis Wysocki discusses some of the values of this type of embodied multimodal composition. Wysocki explains how embodiment involves both the active experience of a composition by its producer and the passive experience of a composition by its audience. Wysocki claims that multisensory compositions are necessary, because it is through our bodily senses that we know the world:

“[E]mbodiment is an ongoing process to which we need attend and for which we need engagement with a range of media” (p. 22).

By inhabiting more than one mode and engaging multiple senses, epideictic occasional cakes invite both their producer (i.e., the cake decorator) and their audience (i.e., the celebrated and partygoers) to experience the world in a particular way, within a specific space and time.

ACTIVIST OCCASIONAL CAKES REPRESENT ONE REALITY AND INSPIRE A NEW ONE

Given how occasional cakes share every other characteristic of epideictic rhetoric, how does the last part of Sheard's definition apply? How does my niece's plushie monster and robot cake “interpret and represent one reality for the purpose of positing and inspiring a new one”? I

argue that it does not, and that many occasional cakes do not inspire new realities either. However, in a different context—in which a celebratee's reality was that the voice of the majority questioned the celebratee's self-worth—one could argue that the celebratee's cake—a multimodal argument to praise and value the celebratee—did propose a new reality. This connection between a shift in context and a shift in rhetorical potential illustrates the importance of the activist component. To support this claim, I offer my observations from a personal case study in which I worked with a charitable nonprofit, Extra-Ordinary Birthdays, to decorate birthday cakes for children experiencing homelessness.

Let Them Eat Self-Affirming Cake

I began decorating cakes for Extra-Ordinary Birthdays (EOB) in February 2015. Founded by Schinnell Leake (L'Oreal's 2015 Woman of Worth), EOB hosts birthday parties for children living in homeless shelters and domestic violence shelters. On its website, EOB describes its mission as one to “transform the lives of homeless children by creating personalized birthday parties that make them feel valued and inspire moments of delight in their lives”

(<http://www.extraordinarybirthdays.org/>). These personalized parties center on a theme chosen by the birthday child, and every party includes decorations, games and activities, gift bags, snacks, a gift, and a cake.

I first began to decorate cakes that “inspire a new reality” after speaking directly with Ms. Leake, an exuberant and compassionate woman whose passion for birthday celebrations rivals my mother’s. Ms. Leake added me to her list of volunteers, and a couple of days later, I received an email with the names, ages, and theme requests of two girls: a two-year-old with a Minnie Mouse party and a ten-year-old with a Frozen party.³ The process of designing, shopping for, baking, decorating, and delivering the cakes gave me considerable insight into the many rhetorical decisions involved in making occasional cakes with an activist component.⁴

DESIGNING

I started designing the cakes about a week before the parties. I wanted to do something the children would recognize easily, so I went with a full-body Minnie Mouse and as much of Elsa as I could fit on the face of an eight-inch round cake. The size of the cakes was a challenge. Characters are much easier to draw (or more specifically, pipe) on larger surfaces, which is why I typically do them on a 13-inch by 9-inch rectangular cake. However, Ms. Leake specifically asked me to keep the size small. She told me that the families were not allowed to bring leftover cake back to their rooms. What

she did not have to say, was that bringing more cake than they could eat, knowing the leftovers would be thrown out, was disappointing at best and insulting at worst. Although larger cakes might have yielded more aesthetically pleasing designs, the smaller eight-inch rounds were absolutely necessary to appropriately celebrate and honor the recipients without causing undue sadness.

I searched online for images of the two characters to use as guides, and after browsing through multiple versions of coy Minnies and sultry Elsas, I decided on an open-armed Minnie reaching up for a hug and an open-handed Elsa creating magic snow. Rather than designing cakes in which the depicted female characters exist merely to be gazed upon, I wanted these characters to demonstrate values worth emulating: a welcoming and kind Minnie Mouse, a strong and powerful Elsa.

SHOPPING FOR SUPPLIES

On a snowy Saturday morning, five days before the birthday parties, I went shopping for cake boxes and new dyes. I found some snowflake rings to add to the Frozen cake, figuring that in addition to decorating the cake, the rings could be repurposed as souvenirs for the ten-year-old birthday child and her friends. I could not buy a similar trinket for the two-year-old birthday child, because every Minnie

³ To respect the cake recipients’ privacy, their names have been omitted from this text and obscured in photographs of the cakes.

⁴ Ms. Leake and I decided against interviewing or surveying the birthday children or their families, because we did not want to distract from the

celebrations in any way. Therefore, the following narrative draws from my personal observations and not from the experience of the people being celebrated. Future research in this area might seek to address this limitation and better represent the voice of a marginalized group.



Figure 5: Both cakes included representations of the birthday child's requested theme (left, Minnie Mouse; right, Frozen), the child's age, and the child's name (obscured here, see Footnote 3). Source: personal collection.

Mouse item was a choking hazard for her age group. I almost purchased fancy birthday candles, but I decided against it because I did not know whether lighting candles in the shelter was allowed.

Even though the cakes had not yet materialized, something as simple as shopping for cake supplies (an activity I had completed many times before) forced me to consider how the materiality and the spatiality of the cakes factored into the composition process. By decorating cakes in a new context, I was facing rhetorical decisions I had not actively deliberated before. Just as Ms. Leake's request to make a small cake made me consider how a waste of cake can offend, the wide variety of disposable and dangerous cake decorations at the cake supply store made me actively consider the appropriateness of my purchases for these and future cakes.

BAKING

On Sunday, with the help of my two-year-old daughter, I made four round

yellow cakes from two cake mixes. About five minutes after I put the cakes in the oven, I remembered that the ten-year-old birthday child had requested a chocolate cake. If this cake had been for someone in my family, I might have considered giving her a yellow cake anyway. However, I realized that if the message of the cake was that she mattered, that her wants and needs mattered, I needed to give her the flavor she explicitly asked for. I baked a chocolate cake on Monday.

DECORATING

On Monday evening, I decorated the Minnie Mouse cake, and on Tuesday evening, I decorated the Frozen cake (see Figure 5). I piped the designs in homemade buttercream frosting, and each cake was done in about an hour and a half.

As a single mother with a two-year-old and a nine-month-old, I had to plan childcare for both evenings of cake decorating, and on both evenings, two of my favorite babysitters volunteered their time to watch my children. Their

generosity reminded me of the community aspect of civic contributions. As I attempted to assist other parents (the vast majority of which are also single mothers) in celebrating the lives of their children, members of my community offered their assistance to me. *Their* rhetorical decision, to not charge me for their time, factored into the composition of this multimodal activist assignment in an unanticipated and delightful way.

DELIVERING

When I arrived at the shelter (a modified elementary school) on Wednesday night, Ms. Leake buzzed me in and led me to the cafeteria, where a handful of volunteers were inflating balloons, smoothing out plastic tablecloths, and crumpling up sheets of paper for a snowball fight game. Ms. Leake showed me exactly where to place each cake, invited me to attend or assist with the parties, and handed me an EOB apron and a snack tray to assemble.

As two groups of about six children arrived, and as the party activities began, I was surprised to notice no difference between the actions of these partygoers and the actions of any other group of children I have ever seen at a birthday party. The setting of the party seemed to have zero influence on the partygoers' abilities to fully partake in the Frozen- and Minnie-Mouse-themed crafts, games, and snacks, complete with the chatter, joking, shrugging, smiles, cries, pouts, and laughter typical of children's birthday parties. The only time the circumstances interfered with the celebration was the

shelter-enforced restriction against lighting birthday candles ("They used to allow candles, but not anymore," Ms. Leake informed me), but we sang "Happy Birthday" loudly, and the older of the two birthday girls proudly cut and served her own cake.

In an hour and a half, the kids returned to their rooms, and in Ms. Leake's debrief to the volunteers, she made two comments that referenced the epideictic nature of the cakes: "Having a cake with their name on it—that's huge" and "She asked for chocolate and she got it."

I would later learn that personalization is a top priority for EOB parties, because the valuing of a child's "personal" preferences represents valuing of the child him- or herself. In this context, "personalization" is akin to "humanization." This is especially important for a marginalized group that experiences dehumanization whenever their challenges are overlooked or their very existence is ignored in either public discourse, such as policy deliberations (Kaufmann, 2013), or in private discourse, such as in-person encounters (Waldholz, 2015).

REFLECTION

In addition to the cakes' contribution to the overall personalization of the EOB parties, I contend that the cakes were epideictic in the extent that they met each component of Sheard's definition of the function of epideictic rhetoric:

- The cakes were educative. We learned the celebratees' favorite TV show and film, and their favorite flavors.

- The cakes were ritualistic. Friends and family sang “Happy Birthday” before serving the cake. To replace the denied ritual of blowing out birthday candles, one of the celebratees responded to the spatial constraints by adapting the previously discussed ritual associated with wedding cakes—cutting her cake.
- The cakes elicited judgment. Partygoers complemented the appearance and taste of the cakes, and more importantly, everyone praised the birthday girls for providing the occasion for having a party and a birthday cake, that is, for being born and being an important part of their friends’ and families’ lives.
- Similarly, the cakes supported and initiated discourse, in that everyone who saw the cakes wished the girls a happy birthday, including people who lived or worked in the shelter but did not attend the party.
- Finally, the cakes not only participated in reality at a critical moment in time but also represented one reality while inspiring a new one. The cakes participated in the event by contributing to the party decorations and activities, which softened but did not obscure the “reality” of the homeless shelter. The cakes represented one reality, in which a personalized birthday

cake is a stranger’s donation, and inspired a new reality, in which having a home enables the baking and decorating of homemade cakes.

This final point is especially important, because it demonstrates how these birthday cakes are epideictic in more than one way. In addition to communicating to the birthday children (as well as their guests) that their lives are worth celebrating, the cakes also communicate to the parents of the birthday children that their community recognizes their challenges but also respects them as parents.

In their research of birthday celebrations among low-income families and mothers receiving government assistance, Jaerim Lee, Mary Jo Katras, and Jean W. Bauer (2008) and Addy Bareiss, Alicia Woodbury, and Alesha Durfee (2009) describe the importance of this reaffirmation for the parents. Lee et al. claim that by enacting culturally significant birthday celebration rituals, families facing financial insecurity aim to “show their children that they are important...that their families can celebrate their birthdays just like other families...” (p. 547). They use a variety of strategies and resources to provide their children with themed parties, gifts, and decorated cakes, specifically to positively impact the child’s sense of self-worth, “to infuse their children with a feeling of normalcy” (Lee et al., p. 547). Lee et al. describe the birthday cake in particular as one of the “main ritual artifacts of children’s birthday celebrations” (p. 547).

For these families, birthday celebrations are just as important to the parents' sense of self-respect as they are to the child being celebrated. Bareiss et al. describe how parents, specifically mothers, who receive government assistance face a social stigma: "Popular scripts of 'welfare mothers' collapse the rich and difficult experiences of poor mothers. . . . [N]ot only must they meet the ideals of cultural motherhood, they must also successfully resist being labeled a 'bad' mother" (p. 87). Bareiss et al. explain how women in this situation perceive the ability to host birthday celebrations for their children, in accordance with cultural norms, as necessary for overcoming this stigma. In interviews with mothers receiving government assistance, the authors noted that the birthday cake "was often described as essential" to the birthday celebration (p. 90).

Birthday cakes are certainly *not* essential from the standpoint of nutritional sustenance, and the extent to which birthday cakes are essential to birthday parties stems from a class-based cultural standard. Yet this cultural standard is so ubiquitous, that most children, regardless of their life circumstances, expect to see a birthday cake at a birthday party. I was reminded of this the last time I delivered a cake for an EOB party, when a young child briefly poked her head in the door, and then ran back to the designated party room, announcing to the guests: "The cake is here." Note: not *a* cake, but *the* cake. There seemed to be no doubt for this young child that the birthday party she

was about to attend would feature a birthday cake. Although a cultural studies framework might critique the proliferation of such a superfluous, class-based object as a decorated cake, the fact remains that birthday cakes communicate a fairly universal epideictic message that vulnerable populations deserve to hear.

Multimodality Takes the Cake

As the results of the case study demonstrate, epideictic cakes can serve a civic function well, "as a means of envisioning and urging change for the better" (Sheard, 788). However, to expand on Sheard's claim that epideictic rhetoric can serve a civic function, I contend that multimodal epideictic rhetoric is particularly well suited to communicating activist messages.

Multimodal composition is particularly advantageous in rhetorical arguments that represent marginalized groups, anyone who is seldom heard and often silenced. For example, in "Detroit and the Closed Fist: Toward a Theory of Material Rhetoric" (1998), Richard Marback describes how the public sculpture, "Monument to Joe Louis," is just as much a reminder of "the struggles of African-Americans and the continuing crises of racism" as it is a tribute to one African-American national hero (p. 78). Drawing in part on parallels between the monument and the closed fist associated with Black Power activists, Marback notes how the multimodality—specifically, the "corporeality, spatiality, and textuality" (p. 88)—of the sculpture is part of its rhetorical argument: "The fist thrust

horizontally in midair evokes experiences and materializes conditions of contemporary struggles for meaning and value in city life” (p. 85). Likewise, Jamie White-Farnham describes in “Changing Perceptions, Changing Conditions: The Material Rhetoric of the Red Hat Society” (2013) how members of the Red Hat Society, a social club for aging women, wear handmade red hats and other dramatic regalia during all of their public excursions, to not only address but also intervene in “the marginalization or invisibility of aging women” (p. 475).

Connecting activist rhetoric and multimodal composition with epideictic rhetoric, Matt Ratto and Megan Boler describe the activist potential inherent in multimodal composition (referred to as “critical making”) in a way that resembles Sheard’s definition of the function of epideictic rhetoric, to represent one reality and inspire a new one: “[S]haping, changing, and reconstructing selves, worlds, and environments in creative ways...challenge[s] the status quo and normative understandings of ‘how things must be’” (5). It is worth noting that the multimodal and activist arguments featured in *DIY Citizenship* utilize mediums that the average person, acting as an activist citizen, can manipulate to construct or support an argument. The baking and decorating of occasional cake is such a medium.

There are at least two ways to understand how multimodal epideictic arguments function more effectively than epideictic arguments comprising one mode, such as speech or text alone. First,

there is the simple idiom, “talk is cheap,” or as Steve Mann elaborates in “Maktivism: Authentic Making for Technology in the Service of Humanity”: “In short, thoughts matter, but also matter matters” (p. 31). You can tell homeless children that their birthdays are worth celebrating, or you can help ensure that they have a birthday celebration. One requires a lot more effort than the other, but the extra effort guarantees that an event occurs along with a long-lasting memory, for the benefit of the children and their parents.

A second point to consider, raised by Marback, is that material rhetorics demonstrate “the irreducibility and interdependence of corporeality, spatiality, and textuality” (p. 88). As rhetorical and multimodal objects, birthday cakes made for children experiencing homelessness likewise demonstrate this connection. The cakes are corporeal to the extent that they feed people whose access to food has been rendered unpredictable. The cakes are spatial in that they help to remake the space in which they are presented and consumed—a homeless shelter, many of which forbid fraternization between families outside scheduled mealtimes—into a space of celebration, friendship, and fun. The cakes are also textual, in so far as they are inscribed with a message, “Happy Birthday,” and personalized with the recipient’s name and age. The ultimate message of these cakes—that the recipients deserve a happy day celebrating them, despite the circumstances that might prevent it—is stronger because of

the way these three things—corporeality, spatiality, and textuality—work together.

Two drawbacks of cakes as a medium for activism are their temporal nature and that their intended audience is fairly private. This is alleviated somewhat by the distribution and publicizing of photographs of cakes, such as on EOB's website and Facebook page (Figure 6). It is primarily through this second distribution of the message that it achieves its activist function: inspiring others to contribute time, money, or awareness to the issue that homeless children deserve and need to be celebrated.

Implications for Pedagogy

In the introduction of *Toward a Composition Made Whole*, Jody Shipka argues for using multimodal discourse in composition courses to emphasize what can be learned from the process of composing, rather than focusing solely on the outcome. She states, “[C]omposition is, at once, a thing with parts—with visual-verbal or multimodal aspects—the expression of relationships and, perhaps most importantly, the result of complex, ongoing processes that are shaped by, and provide shape for, living” (Shipka, 17). As I demonstrated in the previous section, providing a cake for a celebration is multimodal in that it involves corporeal, spatial, and textual modes of discourse. As I described in the account of my case study, the process for providing such a cake involves multiple steps, each of which requires deliberate rhetorical decisions. Despite the number of steps in

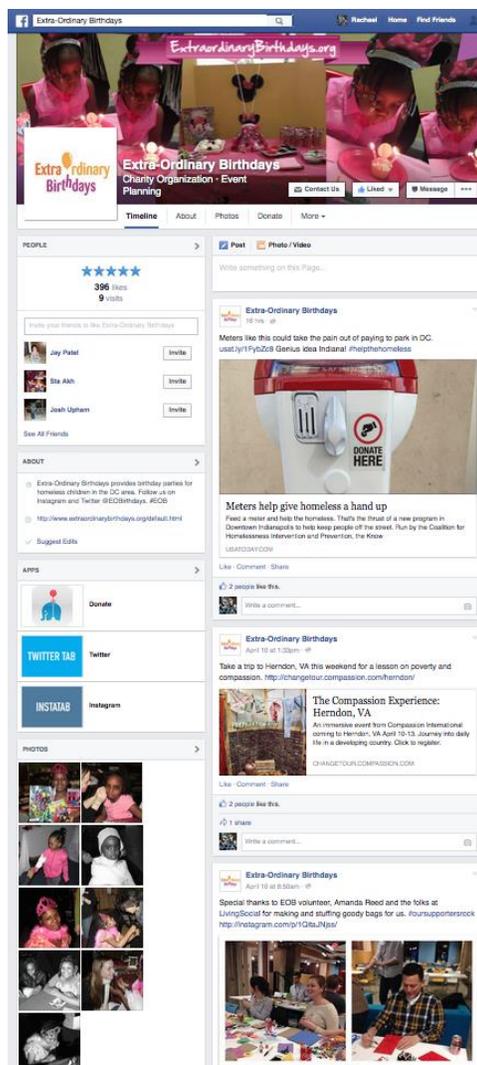


Figure 6: A screenshot of EOB's Facebook page shows the organization's active attempts to publicize the issue of homelessness. The page is updated daily, with pictures of EOB parties, spotlights on volunteers, and articles on homelessness and compassion.

the process, baking and decorating a cake requires little to no prior experience, and because the materials are comparatively inexpensive, the costs of the project are minimal. (That said, you do need access to a working oven). The ease of access with this particular medium makes it a potential multimodal student project for examining

epideictic rhetoric and its activist potential.

The most important aspect of such an assignment is that students provide a cake for someone they do not know personally. This ensures that students actively deliberate rhetorical decisions in the “composition” process, rather than go with what they intuitively know to be true about the individual’s preferences. In addition to providing cakes for families experiencing homelessness, other situations that may benefit from student-created and -donated cakes include birthdays for critically ill children, birthdays in a retirement home, or other milestones, such as “welcome home” cakes for returning veterans.

Whoever students choose to praise (or perhaps, in some cases, blame), in order to achieve the activist potential of the assignment, it is essential that students plan cakes that fulfill the final part of Sheard’s definition of the function of epideictic rhetoric, “interpret[ing] and represent[ing] one reality for the purpose of positing and inspiring a new one.” In addition to my previously described case study, testimonials on the website icingsmiles.org demonstrate how decorated cakes can inspire new realities. Written by family members of critically ill children who received personalized birthday cakes through the nonprofit Icing Smiles, many of the comments emphasize the importance of celebrating these children outside the context of their daily medical challenges, to, in the words of one grandparent, “enjoy a little bit of

every day life” (What others are saying, 2017).

After students identify a purpose and audience for their epideictic activist cake, they will have to consider a wide range of rhetorical decisions. Issues that might have seemed insignificant in a different context will suddenly require deliberate analysis and inquiry of the medium itself and its cultural significance. For example, although it might seem like a minor concern, the decision to provide a whole cake or cupcakes is rhetorical. Ms. Leake of EOB has specific guidance on this issue: Provide a whole cake whenever it is logistically possible. Cupcakes are somewhat easier for traveling, storage, and serving, but whole cakes provide at least two advantages over cupcakes: The larger surface area affords more complex designs, and the unity of one whole cake encourages partygoers to gather around the celebratee, especially for the singing of “Happy Birthday.” However, as first birthday smash cakes become a more popular ritual, EOB has made exceptions for cupcakes on first birthdays, because a cupcake can function in the place of a small smash cake. Considering these types of concerns about the medium itself will force students to deliberately analyze how different mediums perform materially and spatially as well as culturally.

Activist epideictic cake assignments will also require students to consider issues of ethics. For example, students must consider the extent to which cake is an appropriate medium for celebration in different contexts. In the case of providing

a birthday cake for a child experiencing homelessness, how does one weigh the ethics of celebrating the life of a child against the ethics of providing a relatively high-calorie food with little nutritional value to a community that is food-insecure? (To balance this particular concern, Ms. Leake ensures that every EOB party serves healthy snacks, such as fresh fruit and vegetables, instead of other common party snacks, such as potato chips or chocolate candy.) Especially for assignments with an activist component, it is essential that students consider not only the rhetorical implications of their multimodal compositions but also the ethical implications.

Finally, asking and answering questions about multimodality, culture, and ethics in the context of occasional cakes can help students think about the composition process, epideictic rhetoric, and activism in new and memorable ways, in part because cake is not a digital medium. In “Beyond ‘Digital’: What Women’s Activism Reveals about Material Multimodal Composition Pedagogy” (2017), Jessica Rose Corey finds, after analyzing 74 t-shirts decorated as part of the activist Clothesline Project, that the vast majority of her students prioritized the textual over the visual, seemingly unaware of the affordances of visual rhetoric. Corey suggests that to help students understand the importance of aesthetics for rhetorical arguments, the teaching of multimodal composition must

consider some of the advantages of tangible mediums over digital mediums. Given that occasional cakes rarely display more than four or five words of text and are material and spatial as well as visual, the tangible nature of cakes might offer activist multimodal composition a tangible solution.⁵

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that occasional cakes are an example of epideictic rhetoric, and because they are both epideictic and multimodal, they are an appropriate medium for communicating activist messages, especially for representing the values of vulnerable or marginalized groups. Further research in this area might investigate other mediums that have similar capability, building on a growing body of work that combines the benefits of multimodal composition with the benefits of activist composition.

I wish to make one final note to advocate for the making of activist, epideictic, occasional cake. At times, it seems as though there is no end of issues to argue about, and yet, it can also seem impossible to achieve a productive dialogue between those of different opinions. Some people choose to scream or yell in frustration, in the face of their opponent, in all caps in a Facebook comment, into a pillow, into the void (Mazza, 2015), or into a sheet cake

⁵ In her discussion of Freire in “The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change,” Ellen Cushman defines “tangible” as “synonymous with activism” (p. 24).

(Butler, 2017). Rather than merely yelling (or yelling into a cake), I recommend that people recognize cake as a medium that can make a personal, productive, activism possible when we actually do something with it. When someone needs to receive a crucial message of affirmation, perhaps make that person a cake—or a quilt, or a card, or whatever multimodal message is most fitting—to remind them: I value you as a human being, your life is important, and the world is better for having you. Enjoy.

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Re-View: Non-discursive Rhetorics and Multimodality

Murray, Joddy. *Non-discursive Rhetoric: Image and Affect in Multimodal Composition*. SUNY Press, 2009.

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The need to review Joddy Murray's *Non-discursive Rhetoric: Image and Affect in Multimodal Composition* (2009) nearly a decade after its publication may not be initially apparent. However, I deem it important to return to this influential text to explain how it may be applied through multiple academic disciplines.⁶ Here, I want to cover three crucial elements of Murray's text to remind readers of the text's critical importance as it relates to multimodal pedagogy and its connections to cultural studies and political rhetoric. First, I look to situate the influence of the text within the field of composition studies and articulate the importance of re-viewing Murray's text as a multidisciplinary tool for what I consider a pedagogy of resistance. Faculty and students within many disciplines (e.g. writing center scholarship, political rhetoric, visual rhetoric, communication, literature, and digital humanities) can

benefit from the critical framework for multimodal modes of analysis that this text provides.

Overview

In laying the groundwork for his conception of non-discursive rhetoric, Murray structures the book into four major elements: 1) the connections between language and symbolization; 2) the importance of cognitive science and neuroscience in relation to the writing act; 3) the implications of the affective on the mind and body and, consequently, on the writing process; and 4) a potential model to "accommodate the flux between discursive and non-discursive text" (p. 9). More specifically, Murray advocates for a centering of the image and affect (the non-discursive) and the decentering of alpha-centric texts (the discursive). Rather than proposing a complete erasure of the discursive, he emphasizes that "Non-

⁶ In her 2012 review of *Non-discursive Rhetoric*, Jessica Safran, performed a chapter-by-chapter evaluation of Murray's text. This review differs from Safran's in that it situates the book within the

contexts of works published after Murray's book and attempts to emphasize in-detail its multi-disciplinary applications.

discursive texts...generally precede discursive texts” (p. 147).

What makes Murray’s text a particularly nuanced approach to the multimodal turn is his inclusion of scholarship not entirely focused on composition studies but on the sciences (Antonio Damasio), psychology (Vygotsky), and affect and composition (Brand and McLeod). Murray essentially posits that the vital connective tissue between affect, emotion, and consciousness are inextricably bound to the image. As a result of this connection, Murray argues that we must not view the image as merely a tool to enhance discursive, or alpha-centric, texts, but as a generative process through which both our discursive and non-discursive modes of communication come to be.

For the purposes of reaching a wider audience, I have decided to not reiterate the complex theories that Murray includes related to the self, will, and consciousness. Instead, I choose to focus markedly on Murray’s concept of the non-discursive as a type of vessel through which writers and students can reach the discursive. In Murray’s words, “[t]he non-discursive provides a path for the discursive because it is so intimately connected to consciousness and will through image itself” (p. 135). This focus draws our attention to several key points where Murray’s text corroborates his arguments regarding prevalent views of the non-discursive.

Murray writes that non-discursive rhetoric includes “extra-communicative elements” such as “the tone of an essay,

the body language of an orator, [and] the color of the background of a web page” (p. 137). I agree that these elements are critical within the contexts of non-discursive rhetoric. However, the labeling of such elements as “extra-communicative” may suggest that they are somehow non-essential to the production of text. Although Murray refers to non-linguistic action to provide evidence for his connection of image, affect, and consciousness, a more in-depth explanation of the prefix “extra” would be useful for readers unfamiliar with the theoretical frameworks being applied. After all, these elements are not extra but crucial aspects of communication.

He also lays out six lessons to expand our understanding. The third lesson states that “[w]ill must be taught” and that “rhetors must be taught how to will [emphasis mine] themselves to symbolize with a particular audience in mine” (p. 155). As I read this section of the text, I made a note along the following lines: this teaching, this direction, produces discursivity itself. In other words, instruction is inherently discursive to some degree and attempts to produce a type of repetition of norms. This particular section of the text concerned me at first, but Murray addressed this concern in part by writing that “[s]tudents...must be able to become critically aware of the non-discursive elements of these texts [and] must learn how to produce and distribute non-discursive texts as well” (156).

By including elements of play and making as a rhetorical and pedagogical

tool, Murray avoids potentially reinforcing the very discursive elements of communication his book disrupts. Additionally, Murray's advocacy for a type of failure pedagogy – which he includes under the umbrella of a “[w]ill-to-improvise” – emphasizes the necessity for students and writers alike “to confront failure and play within the dark spaces of the unknown, the unuttered, the ineffable” (p. 141).

Nonetheless, as I read Murray's text, I kept asking myself where all the images were. In all, the book contains about six images that are graphic representations of the concepts Murray is explaining within the text itself. These images are black and white, contain text, and serve to represent concepts in a logical manner (see fig. 1, p. 55). The lack of images within a book focused on uncovering the regulation of images and their place within composition is not surprising. On this point, I have two remarks. First, as Murray points out in the book, images have historically been viewed as supplemental to writing, and the use of images is highly restricted and regulated under the guise of copyright and rights. These regulatory structures contribute to the very problem Murray addresses in his text. The second remark I have in regards to Murray's limited use of images centers on his concept of the non-discursive. By limiting the use of images in his text, he is positing an aesthetic argument parallel to the book's main focus. The use of images is inevitable. The image is always present in the non-discursive and it forms meaning and

knowledge that shapes, figures, and refigures the discursive.

Resistance Pedagogy: Possible Avenues

Murray's more-recent scholarship on the topic of non-discursivity further provides essential context to the task of re-viewing the book and its overarching claims. In 2010, in a chapter within Greg Giberson and Thomas Moriarty's *What We Are Becoming* titled “Composing Multiliteracies and Image,” Murray writes on the possibility of an undergraduate degree program that focuses on the concept of non-discursive rhetoric. Much like the language used in the book with which this review is primarily concerned, Murray emphasizes the importance of centering the degree program itself on the image. Furthermore, Murray writes that “composing through image” can serve “as a force for student empowerment, as a means to become critically aware of technology itself and its sociocultural milieu” (p. 224). In 2012, in “Symbolizing Space: Non-Discursive Composing of the Invisible,” Murray extends his concept of the non-discursive to include space: “To walk into a space is to walk into a composed text.” In essence, here he is “walking the walk,” so to speak, in regards to encompassing the multimodal and the ineffable—the text itself is a chapter that exists in both text and video format.

These two additional works by Murray contribute to what could be a larger discussion on the non-discursive that can

inform what I call a pedagogy of resistance. Many of the critics citing Murray's text are writing in composition. Cheryl Ball's essay on the assessment of scholarly media highlights Murray's insistence on the centering of the image (2012). Writing on metaphor and the making of stories and meaning, Kathleen Hart and John Long Jr. emphasize Murray's image-centric approach, as well as the need to teach it because "today's culture bombards students with non-discursive representational forms" (2011, p. 55). Michael-John De Palma writes that Murray's work contributed to his work on transfer and composition. However, what I hope to suggest is the wide-reaching potential of Murray's text for pedagogy studies more broadly, political rhetoric, and cultural analysis.

Scholarly Connections

Non-Discursive Rhetoric proves useful not only in teaching writing but in providing students with necessary tools for penetrating complex systems of discourse and power through lived, educational experiences. As researchers in the humanities and rhetoric, many of us may find ourselves reevaluating our pedagogical approaches in light of the current administration's actions and rhetorical choices (e.g. "fake news," alternative facts). I suggest that Murray's text can inform a multidisciplinary approach to resistance pedagogy in several important ways. By "resistance pedagogy" I mean a pedagogy designed to empower students rather than to constrain them

through the lens of what Freire termed the "banking concept" and a necessarily fluid system of analysis that places emphasis on teaching students how to analyze hidden layers of discourse as opposed to operating on their surfaces.

Murray's text empowers students by placing emphasis on play, making, failure, and ineffability. Although he acknowledges the writing process as having an end-product, I believe that Murray effectively presents the writing process as a necessarily disruptive, fluid, and ever-growing network of flow, excess, and distributive power. Murray's attempt to empower students through an open analytical process can be applied to work being done in all fields of discourse. Murray's text also inherently questions traditional notions of what constitutes discursive forms of media. More specifically, by placing an emphasis on the non-discursive, on the emotional and affective relationship between the student or writer and the image, Murray advocates not only for a focus on the image but creates a point of entry into the evolving definition(s) of rhetoric itself.

To conclude, *Non-discursive Rhetoric: Image and Affect in Multimodal Composition* is a text that can, and should, speak to diverse academic fields. Given the current political climate, of which we need no reminder, Murray's text can help faculty and students navigate these troubling political times – both inside and outside the writing classroom – by emphasizing the importance of the image and how it is constructed. The text helps students connect the image to design through

scientific and philosophical means, and provides a necessarily flexible approach to the fluid process of writing. While Murray in no way presents his concept of the non-discursive as a perfect roadmap to success, his conceptualization of and emphasis on the non-discursive affords us an opportunity to consider new directions in the study of composition and culture in a multimodal world.

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The *Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics*

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The *Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics*, or *JOMR*, is a completely online, open-access journal featuring essays and other items that examine multimodality in all of its cultural, material, temporal, and pedagogical manifestations. While we do welcome work that focuses on the digital, we stress that multimodality does not automatically refer to digital tools or the use of specific (new) media. We are especially interested in perspectives that complicate typical views of multimodality and that highlight those traditional multimodal practices and praxes that sustain our cultures and everyday lives. We welcome compositions that draw attention to the political dimensions of under-/privileged modes and the ways that media perpetuate or contest dominant attitudes and hegemonic norms.

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